

Statement at the mark-up of the Energy committee print
Representative Tom Udall
April 13, 2005

Mr. Chairman:

Our nation's current energy policy is completely out of step with reality. It is a narrow-minded, fundamentally flawed policy that is leading us to destroy our nation's natural heritage, risk the health and well-being of our children, plunder the sustainability of our smaller community's economies, and endanger the security of our nation. Sadly, the Energy Bill before us will not remedy that situation and will only make our energy position as a nation more precarious.

As the representative of mineral-rich Northern New Mexico, I understand the complex issues surrounding energy development. As we move forward in developing a national energy policy an approach focused only on more drilling and development will not meet the long-term needs of this country or my constituents.

Our nation CANNOT drill its way to energy security. Do not mislead the American people by telling them so. There are not enough fossil resources in our nation to lend us any semblance of energy security. Over the last four years, this administration has mostly allowed unfettered exploration for oil domestically, and we are finding only small, practically insignificant oil fields. And, the environmental and social prices paid to extract these practically negligible amounts of oil are skyrocketing.

A responsible energy policy must begin by promoting energy conservation, renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies.

Renewable energy and energy efficiency are the fastest, cheapest, and cleanest ways to address our energy needs. The fact that we consistently refuse to invest in these proven technologies is deplorable. In my state of New Mexico, we have substantial amounts of solar and wind energy capacity as well as other renewable energy resources. But while the federal government gives away billions a year in tax breaks to the oil and gas industry that is returning annual profits in the tens of billions of dollars, hardly a penny goes into building the infrastructure that will bring renewables to market.

Developing these alternative resources simply makes sense. Not only will such a plan boost our economy through the investment and development of these new technologies, but we will create more jobs, inject needed resources into local economies, and protect some of our last remaining wild places.

The bill before us does not do nearly enough to look at alternative energy. In fact, it gives tax breaks to huge oil corporations to further expedite drilling on our public lands. Future generations will not have those open spaces and wildlife to enjoy because

we squander their future for a short-term fix instead of a long-term solution. This is a bill meant to benefit multi-national corporations. It will most likely accomplish that goal. However, in doing so, it will also unfortunately impoverish local ecosystems, economies and communities.

We have pursued a policy for the last four years that expedites drilling in our country – yet oil prices are still skyrocketing. Make no mistake, we are not only doing a disservice to the American people with this bill – we are putting the future of our nation at risk.

I recognize the critical role that New Mexico and other Rocky Mountain states play in meeting the nation's energy needs. However, it is clear that no amount of increased drilling can single-handedly solve the nation's energy challenges. Where drilling on our public lands does move forward and where I would support it moving forward – it must be done in an environmentally, socially and culturally responsible way.

According to Bush Administration, 88% of the technically recoverable federal gas resources in the five major Western basins are open to exploration and development. These available federal reserves are in addition to significant natural gas available on state and private lands. I would discourage the Committee from short-cutting environmental laws in order to expedite gas production from federal lands. Such an approach would wrongly affect hunters, ranchers, local residents, landowners, and conservationists throughout the West, regardless of party affiliation. Again, we are bull-headedly pursuing short-term economic gains for a select few while putting our communities at long-term risk.

Further, land management agencies must be able to balance energy development impacts with other impacts on the land. However, under this bill we will continue to put drilling above all other uses and continue to pursue an unbalanced and shortsighted energy strategy.

As we look ahead, the continued prosperity and security of the U.S. can only be assured if an emphasis on energy production is balanced by an equal, or even greater, emphasis on renewable energy and energy conservation and efficiency. Unfortunately, this bill does not look ahead, does not assure continued prosperity and security, and squanders a real opportunity to provide a responsible energy policy for our nation's future.